
A L E W I F E



Introduction

Historically, Alewife developed as an industrial area that has produced a wide variety of manufactured products, many jobs, and tax revenues over the last six decades. Since the middle of the 1980's, however, the area has changed slowly into an office, research and service center. Today, very few of the industrial uses remain.

In the late 1970's, with the anticipation of a reduced manufacturing base in Alewife, the Community Development Department undertook a comprehensive planning process to formulate an urban design plan which would guide future growth in the area. The process, which involved area business people and residents, culminated in the 1979 Alewife Revitalization Plan. Six goals were listed in this plan: encourage appropriate development; discourage inappropriate development; upgrade the image of the area; limit the scale of development; protect residential neighborhoods; and protect public open space.

While the Alewife Revitalization Plan led to some significant zoning changes, many of the goals of the Plan have not yet been achieved. The Study Committee concerns and Alewife recommendations listed below reflect some of the objectives still envisioned for the area.

In addition to its historical development patterns, Alewife's natural resources also make the area unique: The Metropolitan District Commission (MDC) owns 91 acres of open space reservation containing varieties of rare and endangered plants; the hydrology of the area is such that the water table is very close to the ground surface; most of the area is included in the 100 year floodplain of the Alewife Brook watershed area; and the topsoil has a very low bearing capacity, thus necessitating special foundation designs. All of these features require careful planning.

Study Area

Alewife refers to everything north of Concord Avenue and west of the Alewife Brook Parkway, to the Arlington and Belmont town lines. In addition, the Alewife Center/W.R. Grace site and Fresh Pond Shopping Center to the east of the Parkway are considered part of this area. (See Map on page 57.)

Alewife falls within the boundaries of four neighborhoods (North Cambridge, Neighborhood 10, Neighborhood 9 and Cambridge Highlands); however, for the purposes of this Study, the Committee's concerns and recommendations address the entire area.

General Land Uses

Land uses have changed dramatically in Alewife over the last two decades resulting in a mix of uses throughout the area. Since 1980, one third (10) of the businesses in the North Cambridge portion of Alewife (north of the B&M railroad tracks to Route 2) have changed from industrial to commercial businesses. Almost all of land area has been converted, or is planned to be developed as office space. The only exceptions are the MDC Alewife Reservation and three remaining industrial parcels. (See Land Use Map page 59.) The research and management consulting firm of Arthur D. Little owns much of the land north of the Reservation to Route 2. The remaining properties along Route 2 have commercial uses or are vacant.

To the south of the Reservation, in what is known as the Triangle, the major property owner is the real estate company Spaulding and Slye, owning roughly one third of the land. The construction of the MBTA in 1985 added to the substantial transportation uses in the Triangle.

The area south of the railroad tracks, commonly called the Quadrangle, has also seen dramatic

changes in land use. What was once nearly all industrial, is now a mix of industrial and commercial purposes. Land east of the Alewife Brook Parkway is, or is planned to be for commercial uses.

Zoning

Prior to the last rezoning in 1980, most of Alewife was industrially zoned with districts allowing up to a 4.0 floor area ratio and unlimited heights. The rezoning created ten different zoning districts in the area. (See chart below.)

- The Arthur D. Little district is zoned Office 2: commercial and industrial uses are allowed at a 2.0 floor area ratio with an 85 foot height limit.
- The Triangle is a Planned Unit Development district (PUD-5) with a base zoning of Office 2. PUD-5 allows for a Special Permit, which under certain conditions would increase the floor area ratio to 2.2, and the height limit to 125 feet.
- The Quadrangle contains five separate zoning districts with floor area ratios ranging from .5 to 2.0, and height limits from 35 feet to 85 feet.
- Alewife Center/W. R. Grace Site is in an Industry-C/PUD district which has an F.A.R. of 2.0 and an 85 foot height limit.
- The Fresh Pond Mall is in a Business C district, with a 2.0 floor area ratio.

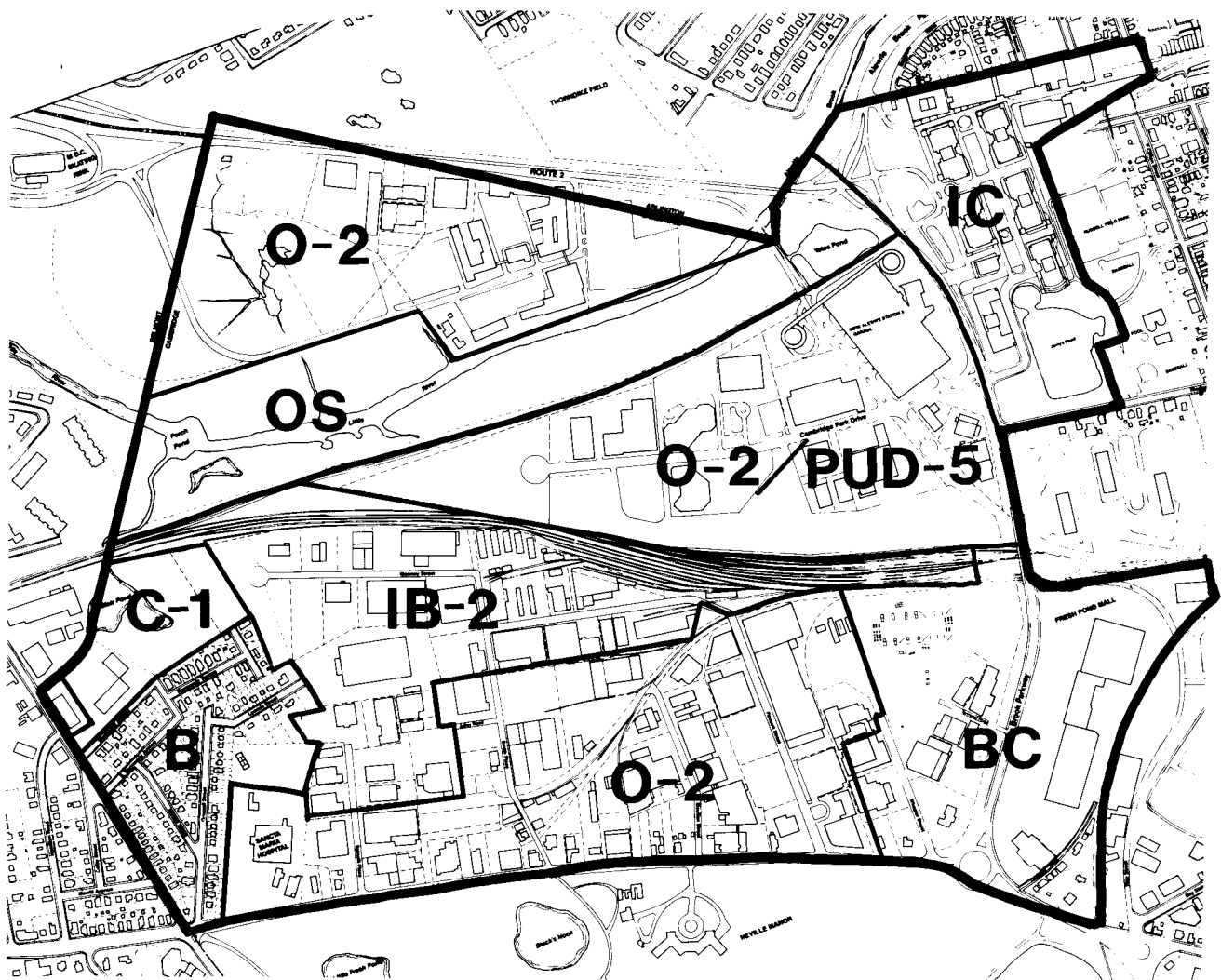
Alewife Zoning Districts - 1988

Zone	Use	Min. Lot Area/ Dwelling Units	Max. Dwelling Units Per Acre	FAR	Max. Height
O2	Commercial			2.0	85 ⁽¹⁾
	Residential	600 s.f.	72	2.0	85 ⁽¹⁾
OS	Open Space				
PUD-5	Commercial			2.2	125'
	Residential	600 d.u. on the site		2.2	125'
IC	Commercial			1.0	45'
	Industrial			1.0	45'
IC/PUD	Commercial			2.0	85'
	Industrial			2.0	85'
	Residential	300 d.u. on the site		2.0	85'
IB-2	Commercial			1.5	85 ⁽²⁾
	Industrial			1.5	85 ⁽²⁾
BC	Commercial			2.0	55 ⁽³⁾
	Residential	500 s.f.	87	2.0	55 ⁽³⁾
C1	Residential	1200 s.f.	36	.75	35'
B	Residential	2500 s.f.	17	.5	35'
BA	Commercial			1.0	35'
	Residential	600 s.f.	72	1.75	85'

⁽¹⁾ 35 feet within 125 feet of a residential district

⁽²⁾ 35 feet within 100 feet of a residential structure less than 35 feet in height

⁽³⁾ 35 feet within 50 feet of a residential district



NORTH CAMBRIDGE NEIGHBORHOOD STUDY

ALEWIFE LOCATION AND ZONING

City of Cambridge

Cambridge Community Development
Fall 1990

Development Potential

The entire Alewife area is developed to a much lower extent than what is allowed under zoning. Currently, the potential exists for an additional 13 million square feet of new commercial development. The map on the following pages shows the sites which are likely to be redeveloped in the next five to ten years.

- **Arthur D. Little District:** None of the parcels in this area are developed to their potential; the most densely developed site has used only 37 percent of its allowable floor area ratio. With the exception of the property owned by Arthur D. Little, it is likely that all other parcels in this area will be redeveloped in the next five to ten years. The total amount of new commercial development which could occur on this land is two and a half million square feet. If these parcels were to be redeveloped for residential use, 750 housing units of could be built.
- **The Triangle:** Since most of the development in this area is relatively new, or recently approved, only two sites are likely to be redeveloped in the near future: 165 Cambridgepark Drive and the 30 Cambridgepark Drive. In spite of this apparent stability, however, most of the buildings are currently using between one third and one half of their allowed densities. Altogether, current zoning allows an additional two to two and one quarter million square feet of new commercial development.
- **Alewife Center/W. R. Grace Site:** The Planning Board recently approved 1,050,000 square feet of new development on this site. Although this amount represents only 60 percent of its allowed density, the Special Permit has capped the development at this amount.
- **Quadrangle, Industry B-2 District:** This entire zoning district, with the exception of two or three properties, is likely to be rede-

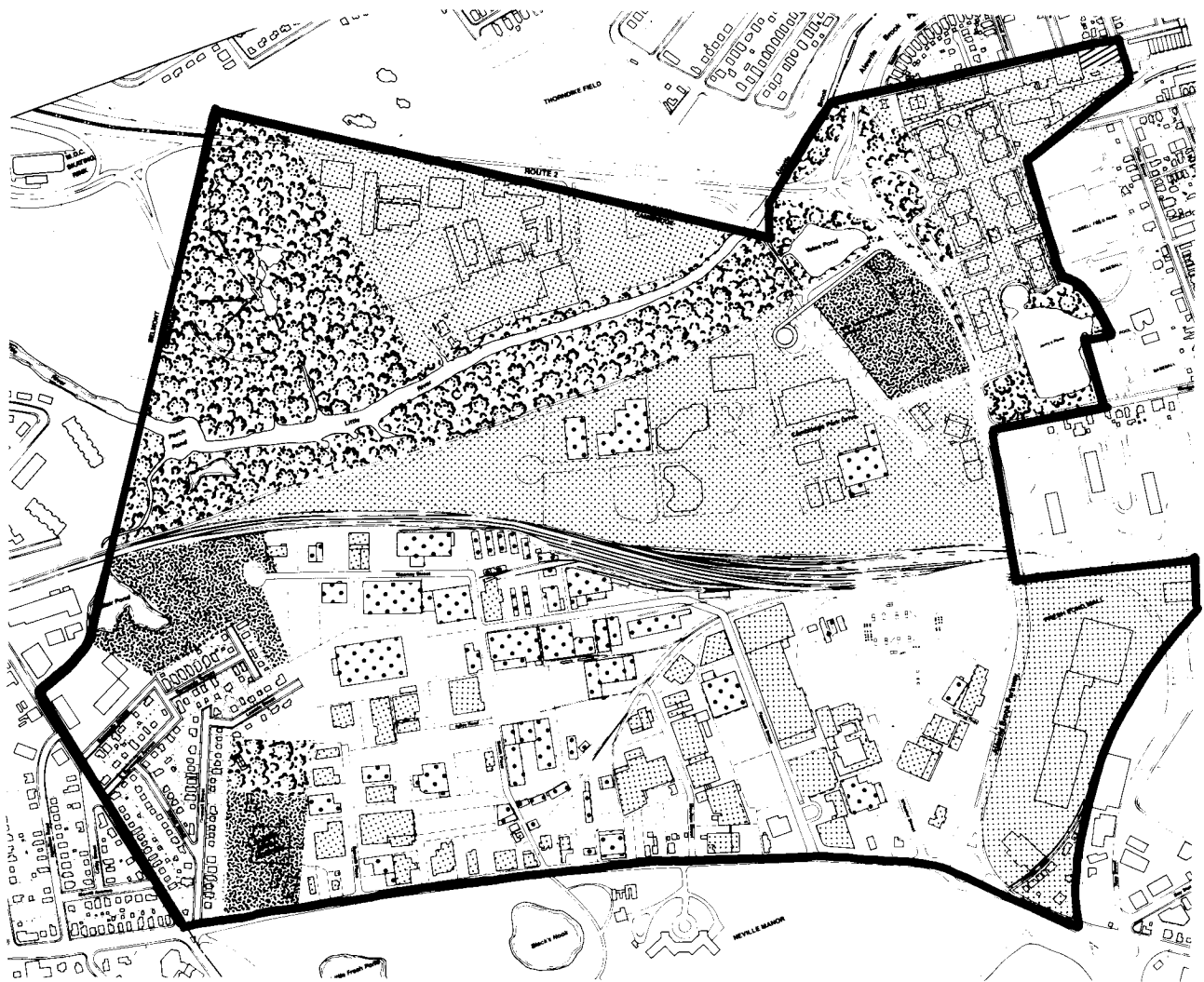
veloped in the future. Altogether, approximately two and a half million square feet of new development could be built.

- **Quadrangle, Office 2 District:** It is likely that just over half of these sites could be redeveloped; the total amount of potential development is estimated to be 3,370,000 square feet.
- **Business C District, Fresh Pond Mall:** Although it is unlikely that the Fresh Pond Mall, the utility site, and various other smaller developments will be redeveloped in the near future, the district still allows an additional two and a half million square feet of new development.

Study Committee Concerns

(1) **Proposed Route 2/Alewife Brook Parkway Improvements:** The Committee is opposed to the Massachusetts Department of Public Works Route 2 roadway proposal (as presented in Fall 1988) for the following reasons:

- It will not solve the traffic problem in the Alewife area, but rather, will merely push the traffic further into Cambridge;
- It will exacerbate traffic congestion at the Fresh Pond Reservation rotary, endangering the water supply;
- Since it will not solve any traffic problems, it is not worth even the lowest projected estimate of \$40 million;
- It breaks with accepted public policy to discourage people from driving into Boston;
- It will exacerbate an already seriously dangerous situation for pedestrians as there are no sidewalks, crosswalks, or railroad crossings in the plan;
- It will destroy the opportunity for the City of Cambridge and MDC to pursue a long-standing vision of creating a Fresh Pond Parkway greenbelt; and









NORTH CAMBRIDGE NEIGHBORHOOD STUDY

ALEWIFE LAND USE

City of Cambridge

Cambridge Community Development
Fall 1990

	Residential		Parks and Open Space
	Commercial		Institutional
	Industrial		Vacant and Parking

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- It will create a physical and psychological barrier between North Cambridge and the Alewife area at a time when the City is trying to pursue policies which will better integrate these areas.

(2) **Alewife Vision:** In 1979, the Alewife Revitalization Plan presented a series of goals which, if achieved, would have created a cohesive vision for the Alewife area. In general, the producers of the plan envisioned an urban looking environment, with mixed uses for day and nighttime activities; attractive buildings and walkways; and plenty of trees and open spaces.

This vision of Alewife has not materialized. On the contrary, the Committee is concerned with the way in which development has been occurring in this area. Alewife has been compared to a suburban shopping center with too much asphalt and concrete and buildings which do not relate well to each other. Instead of being an environment which is friendly and inviting to people, the area has remained stark, mundane and isolated from the surrounding neighborhoods. It has also developed solely as an office district, without any retail or residential uses.

(3) **Potential for Overdevelopment:** Zoning in the Alewife area allows approximately 13 million square feet of new development. The Committee believes that if built, this amount of development would have a devastating impact on the area's natural resources. The wetlands serve an important ecological, as well as aesthetic, function and must be protected. Because the entire area is situated in a flood plain, the amount of development, and the location and form of the buildings are of particular importance.

(4) **Appropriate Development:** In addition to the amount of potential development allowed in Alewife, the Committee is concerned about the type of uses which may be built under the current zoning. For example, if 13 million square feet of commercial development were to occur in this area, it could seriously exacerbate the current housing shortage in Cambridge. Secondly, the Committee would like to see the type of commer-

cial development encouraged which best meets the employment needs of Cambridge residents. Finally, the Committee would like to ensure that Alewife development projects will provide jobs for North Cambridge residents and daycare facilities for Alewife employees and neighborhood residents.

(5) **Design Review:** In order to create the type of environment discussed in the Alewife Revitalization Plan, the City needs a strong design review process. The current zoning lacks this type of mechanism. Presently, the two Planned Unit Development (PUD) districts are the only tools in Alewife which require developers to undergo a design review process. However, this form of zoning has failed for two reasons. First, the base zoning is too high and therefore diminishes any incentive for a developer to use the PUD. Second, because the PUD may only be used when developing 20 acres or more, few landowners can actually take advantage of this zoning.

(6) **Pedestrian Access:** Committee members noted that it is extremely difficult, if not dangerous, for pedestrians to get in and out of Alewife. Crossing Alewife Brook Parkway, particularly during the long morning and afternoon rush hours, is a formidable challenge. If Alewife is going to provide employment opportunities for North Cambridge residents, and if auto transportation is to be discouraged as a goal, then improving pedestrian access to Alewife is essential.

In addition to the difficult crossing at Alewife Brook Parkway, members reiterated their concern that there is no safe way for people to walk to Fresh Pond Shopping Center from Fresh Pond Apartments (Rindge Towers) and Jefferson Park. Since Fresh Pond is the shopping area which serves this part of North Cambridge, it is essential that a safe method for crossing the railroad tracks be created immediately.

(7) **Protection of Alewife's Natural Resources:** Alewife contains some of the few remaining wetlands left in Cambridge. Adequate protection, sufficient maintenance, and active management are essential to keep these lands in the appro-

prate state. The following areas deserve special attention:

- The MDC Reservation contains important, and sometimes, rare, species of plants which must be protected. Because this area is so important ecologically, careful consideration should be given to the degree of public accessibility which will allow enjoyment and appreciation without damaging the resources.
- Little River and Blair's Pond are still relatively pristine. Measures should be taken to ensure that they remain this way.
- Jerry's Pond has the potential to become a valuable community recreational resource. The Pond and surrounding wetlands should be enhanced and better maintained.

(8) **Financial and Technical Support:** Because Environmental Impact Reports are prepared by the same developer who is seeking approval for his or her project, it is imperative that the City have adequate resources with which to review these reports. Yet, the Cambridge Conservation Commission has only a one person staff, and one of the lowest budgets of any Conservation Commission in the state. In addition, the City has only one engineer and few assistants to review all of the flood plain and other technical issues.

(9) **Outdated Database:** The hydrological data base for Alewife is eight years old. Since important development decisions are made using this information, it is critical that the data be updated.

(10) **Comprehensive Flood Plain Review:** Under the current flood plain review processes, each developer is required to assess the impacts of his or her development on the flood plain and employ measures to mitigate those impacts. However, this approach is deficient in that it only examines the isolated impacts of each specific development, rather than the cumulative effect of all development on the entire flood plain.

(11) **Public Safety:** The Committee is concerned about the level of public safety in and around Alewife. Due to the overlapping jurisdiction of public agencies, neighborhood residents are often confused about who has responsibility for lighting and police patrol.

Alewife Recommendations

(1) Any improvements to the Alewife Brook Parkway/Route 2 should be done in such a way as to:

- improve safety and reduce traffic congestion in the area;
- ensure that the water supply at the Fresh Pond Reservoir and the wetlands at the Alewife Reservation are not adversely affected;
- continue the long standing public policy that through traffic into Boston should not be encouraged;
- preserve and enhance the Metropolitan District Commission and the City of Cambridge's greenbelt concept at Alewife Brook Parkway/Route 2;
- create safe and pleasant ways to allow people to walk through Alewife, as well as to cross the roadways to the shopping center; and
- prevent a barrier from being created which would separate North Cambridge from Alewife.

(2) Request that the Massachusetts Department of Public Works prepare a new Environmental Impact Report, containing a thorough environmental study of the Alewife Brook Parkway area and an analysis of the proposed roadway changes and their impacts, before the Fall 1988 roadway proposal for Route 2/Alewife Brook Parkway is approved.

(3) Establish a working committee composed of residents from north and west Cambridge neighborhoods and Alewife property owners to update

the 1979 Alewife Revitalization Plan. This committee should take a comprehensive look at the entire Alewife area and make recommendations to the City Council concerning the amount and type of development which is most appropriate for each area within Alewife. As part of this comprehensive planning process, the following issues should be addressed:

- Develop an urban design plan which will provide guidelines and recommend actions to achieve an appropriate environment for Cambridge, e.g.: buildings whose design reflect the City's rich urban architectural heritage as well as extensive landscaping, trees, and other open space amenities, and water bodies which could more naturally serve as flood retention areas; consider the most attractive and environmentally sensitive manner for addressing parking in Alewife; and explore options for enhancing the Alewife Parkway concept.
- Take measures to ensure that new development will not adversely affect traffic flow, flood plains, wetlands, or water quality.
- Recommend ways to encourage the development of mixed uses, including housing. Not only is housing needed in this area, but the presence of residential units would make Alewife a safer and more interesting area: active at night as well as during the day.
- Examine employment and daycare options at Alewife. Consider possible mechanisms which would strengthen the Cambridge Employment Plan, thereby ensuring that more Cambridge residents benefit from new development projects in Alewife. Consider ways to encourage day care centers for Alewife employees and Cambridge residents.

(4) Work with regional, environmental, and local officials to complete a comprehensive environmental plan for the entire Mystic River Valley Watershed area. The plan should examine the sensitive and fragile ecology of the area, as well as

recommend measures to ensure that the flood plains and wetlands are protected and the open space will be preserved.

(5) The following recommendations apply to the Metropolitan District Commission (MDC):

- Work with area residents to create a management plan for the reservation land. Ensure that ecologically sensitive land is protected adequately, while opening up less critical land for public use and enjoyment.
- Conduct environmental educational programs to increase the public's awareness of the sensitivity and importance of the Alewife wetland areas.
- Work with area residents to investigate the possibility of acquiring Jerry's Pond, Blair's Pond, and additional reservation land near Arthur D. Little.
- Request that Arthur D. Little return the parking lot to open space.

(6) Update the comprehensive hydrological data.

(7) Study the need for a local wetlands protection ordinance which would give the Cambridge Conservation Commission increased control over development in the wetlands.

(8) Increase filing fees so that the Conservation Commission can hire consultants to assist them in their technical reviews.

(9) Simplify the review process by transferring all flood plain permitting to the jurisdiction of the Cambridge Conservation Commission.

(10) Complete Alewife Boulevard following the Alewife comprehensive planning study.

(11) Study ways to improve the level of safety in the Alewife area.

(12) Identify the specific agencies which have jurisdiction over portions of the Alewife area. Improve the coordination of maintenance and public safety issues between these agencies.

(13) Improve pedestrian access from the Fresh Pond Apartments/Jefferson Park area to the Fresh Pond Shopping Center and Thomas Danehy Park. This should be done by adding a stairway to the Alewife Brook Parkway bridge to be constructed

by the State Department of Public Works. Once the Thomas Danehy Park is completed and is being used, the feasibility of a pedestrian overpass will be reconsidered.